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# A Sound Idea: A Theory-Based Synthesis and Explanadum Supporting the Use of Music in Marketing Strategy

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**Abstract** - A review and synthesis of research literature regarding the role and influence of music on advertising effectiveness and in-store shopper moods and behavior is presented. A conceptual model is presented, with strong theoretical support found in classical conditioning, information processing, involvement, and mood states literature. The authors posit that a retailer should use a dual, concomitant music strategy as a component of an overall advertising and in-store marketing promotion plan. This strategy is presented in what the authors refer to as the Music Affect Model. While using the positive effects of music on consumer purchasing behavior as its core source of potency, the proposed strategy should likely lead to enhanced sales outcomes.

**Keywords** – Atmospherics, Music Affect Model, classical conditioning, information processing, mood states, music and advertising, music and in-store context.

**Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and /or Practitioners** – Using research found in classical conditioning, information processing, involvement, and mood states literature, this study presents explanations and subsequent conceptual propositions relating to how the use of music can be used effectively in both advertising and in-store marketing strategies so as to increase the likelihood of attaining positive business outcomes. The understanding, empirical application, and business use of the pertinent theories and concepts discussed in this study should be viewed as relevant issues by educators, researchers, and business practitioners.

# Introduction

Music is indeed an international language, understood in some way by nearly everyone. Rosenfeld (1985: 1) noted “music can move us to tears or to dance, to fight or to love. It can inspire our most exalted religious feelings and ease our anxious and lonely moments. Its pleasures are many, but it can also be alien, irksome, almost maddening. It is created by people to affect and communicate with other people.”

There are few who cannot identify one or more melodies with a vividly specific time, place, or person. A person’s ability to recall an event or moment upon hearing the first few notes of a song makes the study of music and its influences on our lives a very interesting area of both conceptual and empirical study. Psychologists, philosophers, musicians, and musicologists have examined the emotional influence of music on society (Rosenfeld, 1985). An area of study not mentioned by Rosenfeld (1985) was marketing.

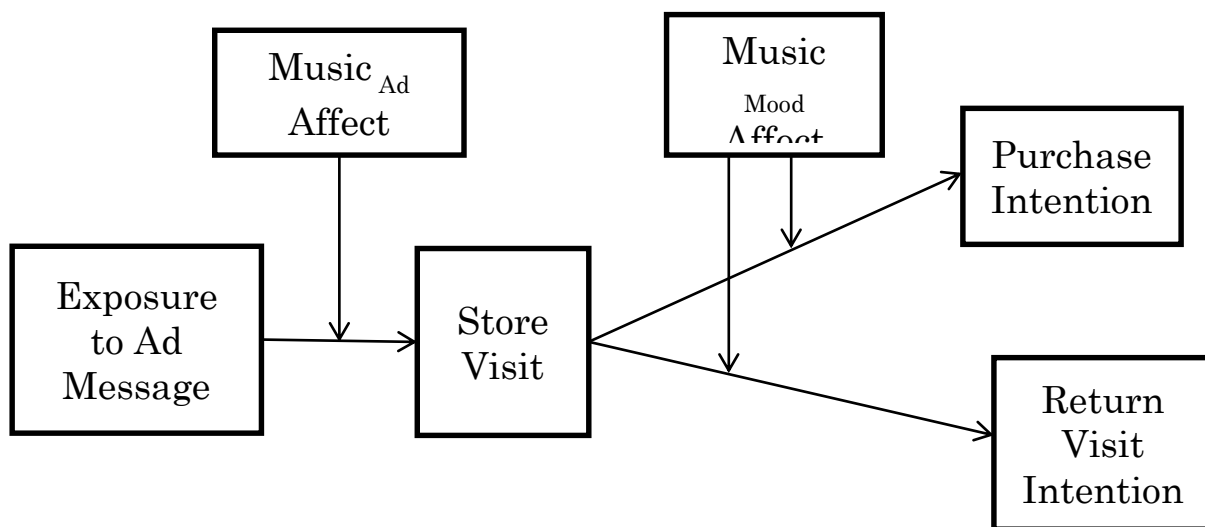
Marketers have been very interested in music’s influence on moods, advertising affect and recall, and in-store behavior. The overall purpose of this conceptual study is two-fold. One, a review of literature pertaining to the effects of music on consumer behavior is synthesized and presented. Though music is a heavily researched topic, streams of research emanating from this area of study have often been diverse and fragmented. Two, a proposed model will be presented and explained, indicating a potential strategic use of music’s affective capabilities by a retail store. This proposed model, referred to as the Music Affect Model, given its strong theoretical support, suggests the use of music in a strategic twin or dual role through advertising and on-site use. A theoretical framework upon which the model is based will be presented. This framework will encapsulate pertinent literature from the research streams of classical conditioning, information processing, involvement, and mood states. A synthesis of pertinent extant research findings may help more fully explain the impact of various genres and structures of music on consumer behavior. Propositions are offered, illustrating the potential likely benefits stemming from the application of the suggested model in the retail marketplace. A discussion of the theoretical and managerial implications of this study, and a summary of the key issues discussed, will then follow.

## The Music Affect Model for Retail Store Utilization

A proposed conceptual model is shown in Figure 1 below, depicting the use of a concomitantly implemented twin strategy relating to (1) the influence of music on advertising effectiveness, and (2) its effect on in-store patronage and in-store behavior. The affected brand or product is the store name and all that accompanies it (i.e., store location, on-site atmospherics, services to the

customer, and product variety/quality/value offered to the customer). The model's contention is that the use of music in a retail store's broadcast media advertising efforts may positively moderate behavior among targeted consumers, from the point of exposure to the ad message to the decision to visit the store. The strategic use of music within the store will also positively moderate behavior of patrons during the visit, the outcomes of the shopping visit, purchase intentions and return visit intentions. The conceptual model illustrates the use of each of the strategies. To be most effective, it will be posited that the two music strategies should be used together. The theoretical framework upon which this model is based will now follow.

**Figure 1: Music Affect Model**



## Behavioral Conditioning and Information Processing

The model presented in Figure 1 initially depicts the moderating effect of the use of music from the point of exposure to an advertisement to the decision to visit the retail advertiser's location. The key components of the theoretical framework underlying this portion of the model are theories relating to classical conditioning, information processing, and involvement.

### Classical Conditioning

Among consumer behavior researchers, classical conditioning is generally regarded as the key mechanism for understanding and producing advertising effects (Allen and Madden, 1985). Classical conditioning theory posits that the

repeated pairing of a Conditioned Stimulus (CS) with an Unconditioned Stimulus (US) will cause the CS to elicit a Conditioned Response (CR) in an unconscious, automatic fashion (Allen and Madden, 1985). In classical conditioning, it is the relation between the CS and the US, which changes behavior. Allen and Madden (1985) found three forms of conditioning research and these revolved around the issues of automatic, involuntary responses per classical conditioning theory, a cognition-based transfer of evaluative meaning, and an affective-driven transfer of purely affective or emotional responses.

It is the issue of affective classical conditioning that is of importance for this review of music's influence on consumer behavior. Allen and Madden (1985) added that the affective-conditioning hypothesis proposes a direct or noncognitively mediated transfer of pleasant (or unpleasant) feelings from the US (ad) to the CS (brand).

### **Music and Classical Conditioning**

In regard to music's influence on consumer behavior, Alpert and Alpert (1990: 111) noted that a "stream of conditioning research in which direct transfer of affect (or liking) results from message execution tactics such as music, humor, visual imagery, color and sex has been shown to influence consumers' feeling states". Alpert and Alpert (1990) observed that the outcomes of conditioning research suggests that when a conditioned stimulus (i.e., a brand or the store name in this study's case) is paired with an unconditioned stimulus (i.e., music, humor, etc.), an emotional response is produced which may be associated with the brand. In this case, an attitude change can be posited to have taken place due to the presence of a simple cue (positive or negative), without the need for a predecessor cognitive reaction. Gorn (1982), who examined the impact of background features on product preferences, researched the effect of music on choice using the classical conditioning approach. Gorn's (1982: 94) empirical study was based on the classical conditioning principle, i.e., positive attitudes towards an advertised product (conditioned stimulus) "might develop through its association in a commercial with other stimuli that are reacted to positively (unconditioned stimuli)". These unconditioned stimuli could take the form of attractive colors, pleasant music, and humor. Gorn (1982) believed that classical conditioning explain the effects of these variables under certain communication-attitude change situations. Gorn's (1982) empirical study became a key contribution to this area of marketing research because up to that time, very little research focused on whether preferences for objects could be classically conditioned. Gorn (1982) found that if an individual is in a decision-making mode (i.e., more involvement) and is then exposed to an ad, then that individual can be affected by the information the ad contains. Ad information, however, has little impact on the individual who is not in a decision-making mode. In those situations, the unconditioned stimulus appears to account for subsequent choice behavior.

## **Information Processing and Involvement**

Petty and Cacioppo (1984: 70) developed the Elaboration Likelihood Model and posited two distinct routes to attitude change. The central route dictates that attitude change “results from a person’s careful consideration of information that reflects what that person feels are the true merits of a particular attitudinal position.” Persuasion would thus take place under the scrutiny of compelling, informative, and well crafted arguments. The level of information processing in this case would necessarily be high. In contrast, attitude changes occurring via the peripheral route are a result of a person associating the “issue or object with positive or negative cues or makes a simple inference about the merits of the advocated position on various simple cues in the persuasion context.” The level of information processing in this case would necessarily be low.

Alpert and Alpert (1990: 111), when reviewing the work of Petty and Cacioppo (1984), and others, reported that the peripheral route might affect attitude change due to the “presence of simple positive or negative cues, or simple decision rules, and attitudes are less affected by issue-relevant arguments.” In both the central and peripheral routes to message processing, information may be conveyed visually, verbally, or in source/message characteristics. What separates one route from the other is the amount of conscious information processing involved. Alpert and Alpert (1990) noted that one of the most common approaches to influence attitudes with the peripheral processing route is the classical conditioning approach.

Research by Park and Young (1986) indicated that the effect of music on brand attitude depends on the type and level of involvement. For subjects in the low involvement condition, music had a positive effect on brand attitude and a distracting effect for subjects in the high or cognitive involvement condition.

## **Information Processing and Music**

Kellaris et al. (1993) found evidence to suggest that music-message congruency (the extent to which purely instrumental music evokes meanings that are congruent with those evoked by ad messages) can influence ad recall and recognition. When congruency is at high levels, attention-gaining music contributes positively to recall and recognition levels. When congruency is low, attention-gaining music appears to serve more as a distraction from ad message processing. In fact, they found that when ad background music is both attention getting and message-incongruent, this would serve to pull listeners’ attention away from the ad and therefore lessen recall and recognition.

Hung (2000: 25) found empirically that viewers could read music-evoked meanings from commercials. Hung noted that the function of music in advertising “is determined not only by the meanings it evokes, but also by its

relationship to other ad elements.” The model developed in Hung’s (2000) study examined how music creates meanings in advertising. Hung (2000: 33) posited, “music works with other ad elements to help ‘cue’ a cultural context that frames the meanings communicated to the viewer.”

### **Propositions Relating to Behavioral Conditioning and Information Processing**

If one assumes that most advertising is received under low involvement conditions, and that classical conditioning may be most effective in low involvement conditions, then it would seem that the use of music as a conditioned stimulus may be effective in increasing ad affect, brand recognition, and brand recall. As noted previously, the model presented in the Figure represents the retail store name as the product brand, thus the benefits accruing to the store name as a result of the ad affect should result in increased patronage. Congruent music cues relate to the extent that evoked meanings from the music played in an advertisement are in agreement with, or parallel to, the meanings evoked by the ad message and the intended positioning objectives of the marketer. Appropriate music cues relate to the suitability or compatibility of the music genre (form or style) and structure (pitch, tempo, volume, and other characteristics) selected to achieve the positioning objective. Suitability would thus seem to be an integral contributing factor to the attainment of desired levels of congruency.

Propositions that have emerged as a result of the discussion on behavioral conditioning and information processing are presented below:

**P1:** Under conditions of low involvement, the use of appropriate and congruent (versus inappropriate and incongruent) music cues as a conditioned stimulus in media advertising will result in higher (versus lower) levels of store name recall.

**P2:** Under conditions of low involvement, the use of appropriate and congruent (versus inappropriate and incongruent) music cues as a conditioned stimulus in media advertising will result in higher (versus lower) levels of store name recognition.

**P3:** Under conditions of low involvement, the use of appropriate and congruent (versus inappropriate and incongruent) music cues as a conditioned stimulus in media advertising will result in higher (versus lower) levels of store name advertising affect.

**P4:** Under conditions of low involvement, the use of appropriate and congruent (versus inappropriate and incongruent) music cues as a conditioned stimulus in media advertising will result in higher (versus lower) levels of store walk-in traffic and patronage.

## Mood States and Their Effects on In-Store Behavior

The model presented in the Figure also depicts the moderating effects of the use of music on the effects of the decision to visit a store on intentions to purchase and intentions to return to the store. The key components of the theoretical framework underlying this portion of the model are extant research relating to mood states, in-store context, and the impact of music on each of these variables.

### Mood States

Moods are defined in the marketing context as feeling states that are subjectively perceived by individuals. Moods are contrasted with emotions, in that emotions are typically more intense (Gardner, 1985). Some very interesting research work has been completed on the effects of mood on consumer behavior. Pham (1998) noted that consumers may make purchase decisions, not based on evaluations of product attributes, but on the feelings experienced as they consider the product. Positive feelings will tend to lead to a favorable evaluation of a given product and in contrast, negative feelings will lead to an unfavorable evaluation. This process is referred to in research literature as the “How do I feel about it?” or HDIF heuristic.

Lee and Sternthal (1999) found in the course of their study that, compared to a neutral mood, a positive mood can enhance the learning of brand names by fostering relational elaboration. Relational elaboration refers to the mental process linking a brand name to the category in which it holds membership. This aid in recalling a brand name would be of great value to marketers, for if moods can be enhanced, opportunities for increased product recall and overall competitive success could be targeted.

Gardner’s (1985) review on mood states and consumer behavior found that feelings-oriented factors could have a key role in consumer attitude formation and brand selection. Gardner (1985) found moods to be an important set of affective factors that might very well influence consumer behavior relating to ad exposure and brand selection.

### Music and Mood States

Interesting research studies have shown the effect of music on individuals. Rosenfeld (1985), in reporting the results of several studies, stated that people consistently react to the pitch and tempo of music. Pitch affects pleasantness ratings, while tempo affects activation ratings. People will tend to have vivid associations with certain songs or instrumentals, and will also tend to free-



associate while listening to them. An association can be an experience that was happy, sad, or some other emotion. Individuals respond to music with a mixture of psychological and physiological reactions. These reactions are a reflection of the cultivation of personal experiences, training, associations, and expectations.

Bruner (1990) concluded that even though music has long been considered an efficient and effective means with which to trigger moods and communicate nonverbally, it was not well understood or controlled by marketers. While music may affect mood and possibly consumer behavior, Bruner (1990) concluded that music is likely to have its greatest effect when consumers have high affective and/or low cognitive involvement with the product.

### **In-Store Context**

Kotler (1973) prescribed the importance of the in-store environment to consumer behavior and store success. Kotler (1973: 48) posited, “one of the most significant features of the total product is the place where it is bought or consumed. In some cases, the place, more specifically the atmosphere of the place, is more influential than the product itself in the purchase decision. In some cases, the atmosphere is the primary product.” Kotler (1973) referred to these ‘atmospherics’ to describe the conscious designing of space to create certain effects in buyers. The objective should be to design buying environments to produce specific emotional effects in the buyer that enhance his purchase probability. Kotler (1973: 54) posited that the store’s atmosphere could have an effect on purchase behavior by establishing at least three media: an attention-creating medium, a message-creating medium, and an affect-creating medium. The affect-creating medium includes colors, sounds, and textures. Kotler (1973: 54) related the storeowner’s objective to classical conditioning. “Just as the sound of a bell caused Pavlov’s dog to think of food, various components of the atmosphere may trigger sensations in the buyers that create or heighten an appetite for certain goods, services, or experiences. In this respect, atmosphere plays the role of a very specific situational factor helping to convert behavioral intentions into actual buying behavior.”

Belk (1975) too wrote of the importance of situational factors in helping to explain variations in buyer behavior. Included among the five groups of situational characteristics, as drawn from past research taxonomies, are physical surroundings, which includes location, décor, lighting, aromas, and sounds.

### **Music and In-Store Context**

Several studies have examined the effect of music on consumer behavior in a retail in-store atmosphere. Smith and Curnow (1966) found that retail management had accepted music as a way to encourage purchases. The use of music in supermarkets was designed to make shopping enjoyable and to distract

attention from the total cost of that day's shopping trip. Carefully selected music had proven to be a highly successful tool in which to create a pleasant, relaxed shopping atmosphere for customers. In citing past research, Smith and Curnow (1966) related that a certain degree of noise was found to actually improve performance, while a lower or higher degree retarded performance. In one study, sales per minute increased with loud music, because less time was spent in the store.

Yalch and Spangenberg (1990: 60) examined the effect of music on shopper behavior and found that "shoppers do respond psychologically and behaviorally to environmental factors such as music even though few shoppers consciously note the presence of music." Yalch and Spangenberg (1990) found it intriguing that there was a clear difference in perceptions of the amount of time spent shopping as a function of age and type of music. Yalch and Spangenberg (1990) posited that perceptions of time spent could be deceptive when you are hearing music that you like versus music that you do not like. Yalch and Spangenberg (1990) related that research has shown that shoppers have a tendency to shop faster if fast music is playing, and conversely, shop slower if slow music is playing. Merchandise is perceived to be higher priced when classical music is played and lower priced when country and western music is played. Also, music that facilitates discussion (soothing music) between the shopper and the salesperson may be most desirable in certain types of stores. When exposed to the music they like, shoppers will seemingly tend to spend more time shopping than they had originally planned. Also, shoppers reported being in an active mood when listening to favorable music, and tend to make more unplanned purchases in this situational context. Yalch and Spangenberg (1990) recommended that stores would probably benefit from playing a variety of music for its different departments, given the shopper profile of each department.

### **Propositions Relating to Mood Affect**

The research review encompassing mood, music influences on mood, and the possible effects of music on in-store patrons has demonstrated the empirical framework underpinning the mood affect portion of the proposed model in the Figure. Attention to in-store atmospherics, which would include the playing of appropriate and congruent genres and structures of music in the foreground/background mode, should moderate patron shopping behavior and influence outcomes related to purchase intention and return visit intention.

Propositions reflecting this discussion on mood states and their effect on in-store behavior are presented below:

**P5:** The appropriate and congruent (versus inappropriate and incongruent) use of music as a component of the total store atmospherics design, will moderate patron behavior and result in higher (versus lower) levels of purchase intention.

**P6:** The appropriate and congruent (versus inappropriate and incongruent) use of music as a component of the total store atmospherics design, will moderate patron behavior and result in higher (versus lower) levels of store revisit intention.

**P7:** The appropriate and congruent (versus inappropriate and incongruent) use of music as a component of the total store atmospherics design, will moderate patron behavior and result in higher (versus lower) average gross amounts purchased per patron, and higher (versus lower) average gross sales recorded each day.

**P8:** The appropriate and congruent (versus inappropriate and incongruent) use of music as a component of the total store atmospherics design, will moderate patron behavior and result in more (versus less) minutes devoted to the shopping experience on average by each shopper during each trip to the store.

## Theoretical and Managerial Implications

The primary theoretical implication of this conceptual study is that key research streams have been brought together and synthesized to present a very sound framework for positing a conceptual model relating to the use of music within a promotional context. It may be found that the proposed strategy is most effective among a given group of marketers (certain service and tangible product providers). Importantly, it may be too difficult to adequately and effectively examine this model on an empirical basis. Extraneous variables would be numerous and difficult to control. Such variables would likely include, but not be limited to, the effects of the totality of in-store atmospherics, temporal issues, shopper antecedent conditions, shopper roles and objectives, climate conditions, and the prevalence of advertising and in-store noise (distractions).

The primary managerial implication emanating from this study is that the use of music in advertising, and as part of the atmospherics within a retail store, should likely enhance current strategies and produce improved outcomes.

Perhaps all too often, music's strategic use is given to one element and not the other, either to the ad or to the atmospherics context. There exists a strong level of support giving credence, on both an empirical and an intellectual basis, that the inclusion of music in the development of marketing strategies may improve the likelihood of their success in the marketplace.

## Summary

This has been a review of the pertinent research literature on music and its influence on advertising effectiveness and in-store shopper behavior. A model was presented to illustrate the use of music by a retail establishment on both sides of an all-important spectrum: on one end, the path leading from ad exposure to a store visit and on the other, the path leading from an in-store visit to desired, positive outcomes. Though perhaps difficult to examine empirically, the Music Affect Model provides an illustration of a retail opportunity emerging in the form of profitably utilizing research previously conducted within the areas of classical conditioning, information processing, involvement, and mood states. Properly executed, the use of music in a retail store's promotion and in-store atmospherics strategy should likely result in increased advertising effectiveness, as measured by affect, recall, and recognition of the store name, increased patronage to the store, and positive in-store outcomes relating to purchase intentions, revisit intentions, and shopper activity within the store. Using music in this strategic manner will make it a valuable component of a firm's overall plan to survive, grow, and prosper.

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